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ABSTRACT

A study was made of eight former Area Winning Community Clubs in Middle Tennessee. Sixteen club representatives and five County Agents were interviewed for the purpose of identifying and describing certain factors that contribute to the organization and continuation of community clubs. The study revealed that every primary reason for original organization and/or continuation came from within the group that constituted the club. The most important single reason for the above, as viewed by club representatives and agents, was that the community as a whole was interested in a specific project and felt that through group action their goal could be more easily attained. The primary reason for continuation of organization over time was because of a desire for recreation and fellowship which could be enjoyed by the group. The community improvement program was shown to be an important channel for Extension teaching. During all three time periods studied, the primary problem was to get members of the community interested in the organization. During the original organization year, the projects undertaken initially were usually simpler, less expensive, and required less time to complete than in later years. (Author/DB)

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A Research Summary of a Graduate Study

SUCCESS FACTORS OF SELECTED ORGANIZED COMMUNITY CLUBS IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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COMMUNITY CLUBS IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE

by

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August 1960*

ABSTRACT

A study was made of eight former Area Winning Community Clubs in Middle Tennessee. Sixteen club representatives and five County Agents were interviewed for the purpose of identifying and describing certain factors that contribute to the organization and continuation of community clubs.

The study revealed that every primary reason for original organization and/or continuation came from within the group that constituted the club. The most important single reason for the above, as viewed by club representatives and Agents, was that the community as a whole was interested in a specific project and felt that through group action their goal could be more easily attained. The primary reason for continuation of organization over time was because of a desire for recreation and fellowship which could be enjoyed by the group. The community improvement program was shown to be an important channel for Extension teaching.

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*Date of completion of an M.S. degree thesis by Roy M. Luna on which this summary is based.

During all three time periods studied, as viewed by club leaders interviewed, the primary problem was to get members of the community interested in the organization. During the original organizational year, the projects undertaken by the club were usually simpler, less expensive, and required less time to complete than in later years.

The majority of the clubs were found to be weaker in terms of interest and project activity at the time of the study than at either of the other periods investigated.

It was recommended that research be conducted to determine the comparative effectiveness of various methods for interesting members of a community in an active community organization and in its successful continuation.

RESEARCH SUMMARY*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the time of this 1960 study, there were 160 organized community improvement clubs in thirty-one counties in the Middle Tennessee Community Improvement Area.

The Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service has a strong vested interest in the future successful establishment and continuation of community organizations in the State since it views the community club as an important channel for Extension educational progress at the county level.

Situation and Purpose

The Middle Tennessee Community Improvement Area had its beginning in 1945 with headquarters in Nashville and sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce of that city. Its main objective from the Chamber of Commerce point of view was, and has continued to be, to bring about better rural-urban relationships. Following 1945, one community in the Middle Tennessee Community Improvement Area was declared Area Winner for each year for fourteen consecutive years until 1959, the year when the entire nature of the program was changed. At the time of this study, only eight of the fourteen former Area Winners were still actively organized. Such a situation provoked this study which was made in an effort to determine the factors affecting the organization and continuation of

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these successful, organized, local community clubs.

Research Methodology

The investigation upon which this thesis is based was made by interviewing two representatives from each of the eight active Area Winning communities in Middle Tennessee and five County Agents who had been working in their respective counties when these clubs were originally organized.

Questionnaires for the interviews were developed to consider the various factors affecting community club organization and continuation. Because of the relatively small number of persons interviewed for the study, a simple rating system was developed for a more precise comparison of the answers received from community club representatives and Agents in the counties. Data for other questionnaire items were analyzed either by tabulation of the frequencies of mention and their conversion into simple percentages.

II. MAJOR FINDINGS

Reason for Organization and Continuation

A summary of the findings of this investigation concerning reasons for the organization and continuation of the eight clubs studied includes:

1. Every reason for organization or continuation ranking as primary (first, second, or third in importance) was a reason that arose from within the club, a need felt by the group, or a desire for something they could accomplish together.

2. The most important reason given for original organization of community clubs studied was "The community as a whole was interested in a specific project, and felt that through group action their goal could be more easily attained."

3. During the period when the clubs were Area Winners, the second most important reason for continuation was the same as the number one reason given for the original year of organization stated above in #2. Later, for the year in which the study was conducted, this same reason did not appear to be one of the three primary reasons for continuation.

4. "Because of a desire for recreation and fellowship which could be enjoyed by the group" ranked as the second most important reason for the original organizations of the community clubs studied; however, later, during both periods of continuation included, the above stated reason ranked first in importance.

5. Both during the year of original organization and at study time, the reason for organization and continuation which ranked third in importance was "Because of the desire of the citizens of the community to cooperatively strive toward a higher standard of living for themselves." During the year when the clubs were Area Winners, the reason ranked only fifth in importance.

6. "The citizens of the community had a desire to excel in order to receive recognition and/or awards" was apparently not one of the primary reasons for organization, and the only period of history during which this reason ranked high was when the clubs were Area Winners.

7. Apparently no single outside force (such as religious leaders

or groups, other clubs already organized in the county, urban sponsoring groups, or Extension workers) played the outstanding role in encouraging either the original organization or continuation of these clubs.

Problems in Organization and Continuation

A summary of the findings of this investigation concerning problems confronting the clubs during their organization and continuation includes the following:

1. Throughout the entire history of all clubs studied, the foremost problem was "Getting all members of the community interested in the organization."

2. During the year of organization, the second most important problem was: "The work to be accomplished by the club fell on the shoulders of a few." At study time, this same problem ranked third in importance; whereas, during the year when the clubs were Area Winners, it was not even considered a major problem.

3. "Planning programs to include all age groups" during the year of organization ranked as the third most important problem confronting the clubs. During the other two periods of history under study, this same problem ranked fourth among the problems listed.

4. During the year when the clubs were Area Winners, tabulations indicated that "Obtaining willing leadership" and "Overworked leadership" tied for third place in rank of importance among problems listed; however, the above problems did not rank among the three primary problems in either of the other two periods studied.

5. The problem of "Petty politics in the community" was apparently never an outstanding one in any of the clubs studied.

Projects Undertaken

Secretaries' records and interview data provided sources for the following information:

1. Throughout the various histories of the clubs, the greatest number of projects undertaken fell under the heading "Educational Programs and Activities." A few of the items listed most frequently under this category were "Building and improving homes," "Improving pastures," "Improving lawns," and "Encouraging an adequate production of the home food supply."

2. The heading under which the second greatest number of community projects fell in all time periods studied was that of "Community Services." Items included, but were not limited to, "Building roads," "Securing electricity," "Securing telephones," and "Improving mail boxes."

3. The projects undertaken during the original year of organization were usually, but not always, less expensive and less time-consuming than they were in later years. Such projects as securing needed roads, providing electricity, improving mail boxes, constructing boundary signs, and caring for cemeteries were typical of those undertaken during the year of original organization.

4. The clubs undertook, and presumably completed, more projects during the year when they were Area Winners than they did during either of the other two periods studied. Some specific projects reported for the year of area winning included such items as building a tower to

accommodate the Ground Observers Corps, purchasing a fire truck and fire hall, purchasing a play area and equipment, and sponsoring youth activities (all of which projects were more time-consuming and expensive than those undertaken during the beginning year).

5. For the community improvement year during which the study was conducted, projects undertaken by the clubs totaled fewer than one-half the number of those projects undertaken either during the year of organization or the year of Area Winning. Projects underway at the time of the study included a larger number of apparently individual projects such as "Improving homes," "Improving farm practices," and "Helping shut-ins."

Opinions Concerning Comparative Strength of Clubs

A summary of the findings of this investigation concerning the comparative strength of the eight clubs studied includes the following points:

1. When comparing the status of their club in 1960 with its status at the end of the first year of organization, nine out of a possible thirteen persons interviewed believed the status to be weaker than at earlier times.

2. Of the thirteen persons interviewed concerning the strength of the clubs at study time as compared with their statuses earlier when they were Area Winners, ten of the interviewees considered their clubs to be weaker.

3. When comparing the favorableness of the attitudes of the young members of the clubs at the time of the study in support of the clubs

with the attitudes of the youth at the time the clubs began, seven of the thirteen persons interviewed said such favorable attitudes were either about the same or stronger. Six, however, believed that youth support for their clubs was weaker.

Predictions of Future Strength of Clubs

After having indicated that, in some areas, their clubs were weaker than ever before; nine of the thirteen interviewees predicted that their clubs would continue about the same.

Characteristics of the Presidents

After summarizing all information concerning the presidents during the three periods of community club history under study, the following is a concise picture of a typical president of one of those clubs.

1. The president was male, married, and the father of two children.
2. The president's age averaged 42 years.
3. The president was a high school graduate who had received some training in college.
4. The typical president was a farmer by occupational choice.
5. The president had lived in the community for about 22 years when elected to office.
6. The average term served by the president was two years.

III. CONCLUSIONS

1. Factors contributing to the successful establishment and continuation of community clubs in the Middle Tennessee Area tended to be similar throughout the area but varied in degree of importance from one local, rural-community situation to another.
2. Intrinsic reasons, those born within a community group as mutual needs or interests, tended to offer greater motivation for the successful establishment and continuation of community clubs than did extrinsic ones supplied from without.
3. Problems associated with the identification and development of adequate local leadership emerged as major obstacles to both successful establishment and continuation of community improvement clubs.
4. Satisfactory and lasting community organization appeared to be based on local family needs and interests.
5. The projects undertaken by developing community clubs tended to grow in complexity and expense over time. Members lost interest when they completed all of the apparent community projects they were capable of identifying or agreeing upon as worthy undertakings.
6. Without specific, agreeable projects to undertake, community club members, even in older, established clubs, tended to lose interest in attending meetings. They devoted more and more of their efforts to other, more personally satisfying endeavors.

7. The largest number of projects undertaken by the community clubs were classified as being educational in nature. This verified the findings of previous studies concerning the appropriateness and use of community organizations as an important channel for Extension education.
8. There is an apparent life cycle in the histories of most community organizations in Middle Tennessee. Beginning, maturation, successful continuation, and possible death come about at different rates and times depending on a combination of the reasons seen by members for continuation, the emergence of skillful, dedicated leaders at times of particular need, and the continuing identification and undertaking of worthy projects. All clubs studied showed the need for identification of vital new undertakings.
9. The picture of the typical community club president developed in this investigation was one of a mature, locally-reared, relatively well-educated man who had had some leadership opportunities prior to his election to the presidency. The continuing farm orientation of such leaders was shown by their report of full-time or part-time farming as an occupation.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made below are intended to provide possible guidelines for those interested in applying the findings of this investigation to future Extension Programs and research.

1. Since it was discovered in this study that the most important

reason listed by club representatives and Agents for the original organizations of their community clubs was because of mutual interest by members of each group in cooperatively completing a specific project (satisfying a felt need), and since this finding is further substantiated by hypotheses propounded and opinions expressed in literature cited in the study, it is therefore recommended that Extension workers concerned with the work of assisting communities to become successfully established should devote efforts to helping members of a new (unorganized) community identify appropriate major problems as bases for the selection of specific, worthwhile projects needing organized, cooperative action.

2. Since it was observed in this study that the projects undertaken during the original years of organization in the eight clubs (which were classified for purposes of this study as successfully established community clubs), were usually less expensive and less time-consuming than those undertaken in later years, it is recommended that Extension workers who assist beginning rural communities to organize should devote effort to helping such clubs explore possible alternative projects of the type mentioned above which might be of interest to newly-organized groups. Such projects might include: securing, through group support and action, improvement of roads and bridges; erecting boundary and road markers; improving the appearance and uniformity of mail boxes; improving lawns and homes; cleaning fence rows; improving school grounds; and securing and/or improving an adequate meeting place.

3. Since it was ascertained in the investigation that following their year of Area Winning most clubs studied tended to become somewhat

weaker as far as motivation and interest were concerned, since they tended to "run out of" worthwhile projects to undertake as organized groups, and since a desire for recreation and fellowship tended to become the prime reason for their continuation; it is recommended that interested Extension Agents should devote time to helping leaders of such community clubs uncover present and future major community needs which will serve as bases for the selection of meaningful specific projects needed for the successful continuation and continued growth of the clubs. It again should be noted here that the problem of identifying new worthwhile projects tended to become more complex and difficult over time.

4. Since it was revealed in the study that, as the communities progressed in age and degree of establishment, the projects undertaken, and presumably completed, grew in expense, consumption of time, and complexity, and since following the completion of such projects the groups were inclined to develop rather complacent attitudes regarding the statuses of their clubs; it is therefore recommended that Extension workers (in areas where clubs are growing older and such conditions as those cited are to be expected to develop) should devote increasingly large amounts of time to helping community leaders identify and consider the most pressing needs of the community which could be used as bases for the formulation of worthwhile projects.

5. Since the greatest problem reported by the sum total of the club representatives and County Agents interviewed for the study during all three periods of history investigated was that of getting all the

people in each community interested in organizing a new and/or continuing an already existing club, it is recommended that Extension Agents help leaders of those communities to use appropriate techniques for getting people interested and making them willing to participate.

6. Since opinions expressed in literature cited revealed that people who understand the facts tend to be most willing to participate in any organization from which they derive benefits and in which they have an interest, and since community leaders polled in this study needed ways for creating interest in their members, it is recommended that Extension workers make a concerted effort to explain benefits of reorganization to the citizens of the community.

7. Since it was discovered in this study that among the primary reasons for organization and/or continuation of community clubs were the desire for fellowship and recreation, the interest of the group in a specific project, and the need seen for an organization in which all age groups can participate, in view of the fact that previously cited literature and hypotheses indicated that "what is good for, or works for one community, may not be good for, or work for another community," and recognizing an Agent's need for a thorough understanding of how to interpret the reactions of people, and of how to motivate people and communicate with them before the need for specific projects or activities of interest to all age groups can be perceived and taken advantage of; it is recommended that responsible Extension workers receive training in social science (human relations) areas in order that they might be better prepared to work with and advise the widely differing individuals who make up the various county groups.

8. Since this study indicates that even people in successful clubs tended to develop a self-satisfied apathetic attitude and that they may be unable to identify projects worthy of undertaking, it is recommended that clubs, when necessary, be provided with the assistance of especially trained State level personnel to help ferret out needs which may not be readily apparent and to assist local people and Agents in formulating projects based on such needs.

9. It is recommended that research be conducted to determine the comparative effectiveness of various methods for interesting members of a community in the establishment of active community organizations and in their successful continuation.

10. Since Extension recognizes community development as one of its major areas of program emphasis for Extension education, it is recommended that the Extension Agent consider his role in the field of community development as a serious educational responsibility. He should seek to help community club members identify their community strengths and weaknesses both at the time of organization and thereafter as members move together toward increasingly higher and more complex levels of organized community living.

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